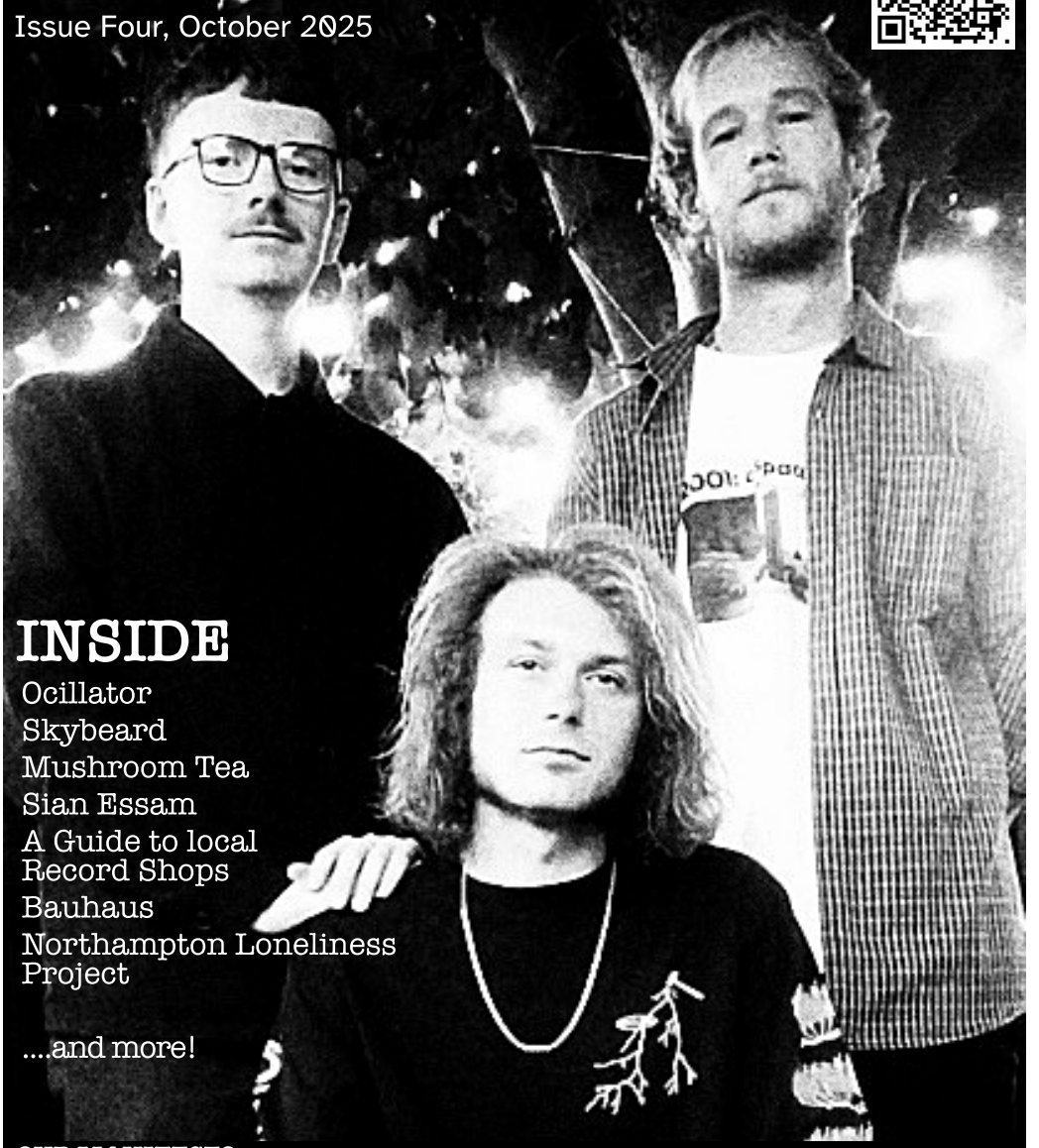
NOTES FROM THE VOID

The A Void Collective Fanzine

FREE

Issue Four, October 2025



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....and more!

OUR MANIFESTO

No one should be excluded from performing their music in public because of their neurotype, disability, age, or inexperience. A band playing their first gig is as valuable as someone playing their thousandth, and the age of a performer has no bearing on how good they are or whether they should be given good gigs.

Some neurotypes and mental health conditions make it harder for musicians to find opportunities and make networking an impossible task, which means the gigs don't come. We aim to remove that barrier.

We understand that some music is deemed too 'weird' to be given good gigs: that's wrong, they shouldn't be relegated to the outer edges of open mic nights - they should be on the bills at proper gigs, with their name on the poster.

We are a group of musicians from various bands, and we aim for full inclusivity, to give valuable shows to the people who are ignored by some of the gatekeepers. We stand against ageism, ableism, exclusion of any kind, and favouritism. We stand for the overlooked and marginalised.

We make each gig valuable to the acts performing, with long-lasting impact. We have an etiquette guide that makes the shows stress-free, and once the gig has ended, we do things for the acts who have performed, whether it's recording them cheaply (or even free), helping with instrument repairs, or enabling them to go and do what we do elsewhere.

There was a void, and we filled it.

Read the long version at https://linktr.ee/avoidcollective

Editor's Note

Welcome to issue 4. Writing a zine takes a lot of time, and during the writing of this issue I was on my honeymoon for two weeks, despite that, we've pulled together a full-length issue.

Recently I asked a band who had previously played one of our events if they'd like to join us at the end of November. They came back to me very positively, but with a single stipulation; they'd require a fee. Now, this is a young band who play a set that's mostly covers, they have promise and in a few years could grow to be something very special indeed, but they're nowhere near there yet.

Firstly, please don't think I'm some dreadful greedhead: I'm all for bands being paid for gigs, and I genuinely wish every gig was a paying gig, but one important question needs to be answered by bands less than 5 shows into their career, "where do you think the money will come from?"

We don't charge on the door, and because of that and our inclusivity ethos, the Lab's very good to us, but we still pay them to hire the venue (as we should). If the bands playing wanted to be paid a fee we'd have to ticket the event meaning we'd be acting as a 'for profit' organisation and would (rightly) be expected to pay the full cost. If the gig didn't pull enough people we'd be saying to the bands at the end of the evening "sorry, we've made a loss, there's no money to pay you".

The only alternative would be to stump up out of our own pockets, which we're already doing to put the events on. Is that what new bands expect fellow musicians to do, to use some of their own money? Like I say, we're already doing that, having paid for events and printing of this zine out of our pockets with no financial return. That's not Special Magic Income that we get from the Money Wizards, it's wages from our day jobs, which we also use to pay our bills and live our lives.

We're not a business, the gigs aren't about making money, the zine is given away for free purely to help the local scene that we love.

I hate to sound like an old fart banging on about the past, but when I was first playing in bands in the 90s it was expected that you paid your dues and built an audience before you had any right to demand a fee. Even now, when playing in ÜLV I am aware that it's not my job and that I need to treat it like a hobby. I've never thought I'd be 'famous', and instead measured my success in terms of having records released by tiny indie labels around the world, getting on John Peel's legendary Radio One show, being able to play gigs around the country, being asked to play festivals, and not losing too much money. I didn't ever demand a fee, and was always grateful if there was payment but was equally happy if I ended the week with the same amount of money as I'd started with.

Theres no denying things are even harder for bands now, with the life of a professional, doing-it-as-a-job, independent musician being less and less accessible to anyone other than the very wealthy (or children of the wealthy). There's a reason so many touring bands seem to be rather posh and privately educated these days. To imagine that you're going to become famous is a dream at best, and outright delusion at worst, and you really shouldn't start acting like you're a star the second you step out of your 3rd rehearsal (after nailing a half tempo version of a Rentals song, but without the middle bit, cos it's difficult) and tell the people who put on gigs in your town that you absolutely must be paid if the show is going to get 'locked in'.

It's like taking up golf, learning how to hit the ball and then insisting you'll only play paying tournaments from then on.

Yes, some venues give promoters money to put on shows, and those promoters then pay the bands, but (and I hope you're sitting down, kids) a good night is going to see you maybe take £10 each home (and that's a GOOD night, more often it's a fiver each for a new band). You'll probably have spent more than that on drinks during the evening.

We've tried to provide value in other ways, videoing the shows, taking photos, writing about the bands in this zine, not everything is about cash.

Sadly, some (very good) bands think it is, and I fear that'll mean they're closing doors on opportunities for themselves, which isn't a good plan if you're trying to build an audience.

Anyway, hope you enjoy issue 4, we've packed a lot in.

Alex B, Editor.

Why The Northampton Lonely Project Matters

Jayk aka 3Point explains

Just over a year ago, I realised I was lonely.
Although i have lots of friends, I didn't have many around me who I could be creative with.
As someone who loves music, and has made music for as long as I can remember, it was hard not having an arena to focus on this passion with like minded people.
I was desperate to work with other people, to open my mind to opportunities I was unable to achieve on my own.
As we lose touch with the things that make us truly social beings, we cocoon ourselves and fade into a background filled with the noise of modern living.
Meaningful conversation, real connection, and creativity have become increasingly hard to hold on to for so many of us.
Many studies show that people are generally more lonely than ever and some studies show that creative people tend to suffer with loneliness more frequently and more intensely. I knew I was at a point where I needed a change, to reach out and form the connections I craved, and surely, if I felt like that, then so did people in my local community - we just didn't know each other yet.
So I simply asked for people to come and meet me, on a Monday, to talk about music, art and culture. A space open to all, accepting of the things that make us different. I wanted to build friendships based in trust, unity and shared interests.
In short, it worked, and as a community we have broadened our horizons, learned from one another and used a shared love for music to drive relationships and productivity in every artistic sense.
What started as a man waiting nervously in a pub for someone to turn up based on an Instagram post, has grown into a 30+ strong network of creative, inspiring and different people.
To be frank, it's been beautifully heartwarming and uplifting.
Meeting weekly, with a focus on physical interaction, I believe we have combatted loneliness in the best way possible - seeing, loving and creating with one another.
If you ever feel lonely, if you ever feel like you're in a rut, if you want to make music or have a creative project you want to share and make with others, if you're looking for space and people to learn from or if you just want more friends, then we'd love to see you.
We meet at 7pm every Monday at the Garibaldi Hotel, Northampton.
It's a free social club, and there will never be a charge to be part of our community.
Please join us by either just showing up, or by dropping me a line on our community Instagram: @3pointlonelinessproject
Genuinely looking forward to meeting you.

I'd also like to extend my infinite gratitude to A Void Collective for asking us to share this introduction to Lonely Club. Northampton is a particularly special place, full of energy and the whole club is proud to be around such a brilliant community.

https://www.instagram.com/3pointlonelinessproject/

Swing Your Arms in a Wild Rotation

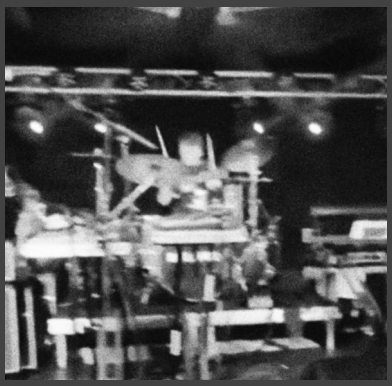
Oscillator bring the groove back

The Gonzo Experimental band were one of those peculiar hidden gems that local scenes throw up from time to time, a genuinely original-sounding quartet led by a wild-haired frontman thrashing at a blue Jazzmaster, while the band around him built layers of hypnotic noise. Then they vanished, abruptly, and without any real warning.
A year later, Oscillator have emerged, three-quarters of the previous outfit slotting straight back into the void their absence had caused. ***Alex Botten*** *caught up with vocalist Chris to find out what's going on.*

Often, when a band disappears, any momentum they'd previously made is lost; venues and audiences move on, bands they played with assume they've gone forever and ask other people to play gigs with them. It's hard to come back at the level they'd previously reached. Last issue, we looked at what had happened to the Gonzo Experimental Band, how the departure of a key member of the group (their mesmerisingly

rubber-legged bass player, a man who grooved to the music like no one you've ever seen) had led to a need to rethink, regroup, and rename, but has this break caused a significant setback? Vocalist and (now) bassist, Chris, has a surprising answer: "In all honesty, not at all, people still seem keen to ask us to play and have been really positive in their reaction towards the name and line-up change."
Listening to an unreleased, and as yet untitled, studio recording, I'm happy to report that the things that made the Gonzos so great have remained in place, but that there's now a newfound urgency to their sound. I wonder, has the musical direction of the band changed a great deal? Obviously, you've put down his Jazzmaster and picked up a bass, but are there deeper changes? "In some ways the direction has changed," says Chris, "but our key elements have remained the same, lots of fuzz, echoing vocals and crazy noises. We've tried to really focus in on each element, to refine what we started in the Gonzos". While the Gonzos had a certain rhythmic push, it's definitely pushed further forward in Oscillator, "Yeah, one

change we've made is a big focus on groove, we really want to get people moving with this project." I'm reminded a little bit of the almost disco noise of Maquina, who you've played with, have they influenced you at all? "We have been incredibly lucky to support some really awesome bands as of late, and I definitely think that some have really influenced us, Maquina, Helicon, Sunset Images



and Autohaus, to name a few." That cross-pollination is a wonderful thing in music, isn't it? I remember Phil Elverum of the Microphones saying that the bands he hung around with, such as Little Wings, all borrowed ideas from each other, and how that level of inspiration, far from being plagiarism, is simply building on work already done. "I really think that's the beauty of gigging," replies Chris, "getting out there and playing with others from all over the world, having a laugh, getting influenced by each other's sound and being able to share that with an audience, it's an awesome thing."

It was a no-brainer that Oscillator should be asked to play an A Void Collective night, and they're essentially headlining the October event at the Lab. What can we look forward to? "Well, we have an ever-changing set including lots of new songs, a couple of reworked Gonzo songs, and maybe a cheeky bit of improvisation, so hopefully it will be something to look forward to!". It's great to see you guys already being welcomed back into the local musical community, "I love the Northampton music scene," says Chris, "there's so many great bands and promoters really making an impact, I can't name everyone but if it wasn't for people like Dave Burkimsher it would be a lot harder to get out there and get people listening."
So, now you're back, what's next? Will you be recording, or is the focus currently on gigging? "We have already been in the studio but the time has come to emerge! We are looking to gig as much as we can, wherever we can! Main thing is we are really excited to show the world what we've come up with, so keep your ears peeled!" From what we've heard so far, the world is going to want to listen.

https://www.instagram.com/_oscillator_band_/

Vinyl Destinations

Andrew Slack's rough guide to the Record Shops of Northampton

In an increasingly digital age people want things. Specifically black plastic disc-shaped things that by some strange alchemy play music. It could be the crackle, the full size artwork, perhaps even the simple act of getting up and turning the thing over. Whatever it is, vinyl is back and people want it.

I'm probably not alone in experiencing digital fatigue, with music streaming platforms and with other media. Even after taking into account the exploitative business models and appalling ethics of platforms like Spotify, there is always the chance your favorite album or artist will disappear from the service completely. Better to own the thing yourself and have the means to play it.

This is where the record shop comes in.
The act of selling records in 2025, while a risky business, is still a viable one, so it's good to see a decent amout of shops still operating in Northampton. Here is a quick guide, so follow it, unsubscribe to Spotify, and go out and buy something tangible.

Abington Groove Records opened last year in Northampton, joining a handful of record shops in the admirable pursuit of selling an ancient medium to a new (and old) audience. There's a treasure trove of LPs, CDs and singles of all genres, as well as an extensive tape selection, which is always good to see. If it's something new you're after, Abington Groove is also home to the resurrected Spinadisc Records, stocking both new albums and re-released classics.

When not fronting Venus Fly Trap, DJing or wandering around

handing out gig flyers, Alex Novak can usually be found at the nomadic Spiral Archive, a record shop that has been around for many years at many different locations. The history of the shop is an article in itself, and I have fond memories of buying Jesus and Mary Chain and Cure records there in the early 2000s, when it was situated in the alley off Abington Street. The shop, like it's owner, is an important part of the Northampton music scene, and representative of the symbiosis between record shop, local promoter, band and music fan. Currently located halfway down Hazelwood Road, and heaving with vintage vinyl, who knows where Spiral Archive will turn up next?

Spun Out, located at the bottom of Gold Street is an iconic and eye-catching shop. With an orange complexion, suggesting an unholy union between Donald Trump, David Dickinson and Katie Price, Spun Out is difficult to miss. It's impassive, marmalade countenance has witnessed the advent of the pound shop, the rise and fall of the mighty Wilkinsons, and has cast a suspicious side-eye at the erection of Sol Central. In addition to stocking a variety of new and used records, t-shirts and accessories, Spun Out is also a standout location on Record Store Day, featuring live in-store music.

So visit your local record shop and buy something, even if it's just to stick on the wall. Unless it is 'The Wall'. Pink Floyd belong in the bin.

Meet **Skybeard**

What has your experience of the Northampton scene been like?
We've all been playing off and on in Northampton for 25 years. The local scene has its ebbs and flows, but there's usually something interesting going on. It's pretty good at the moment, and it's great having quality small venues, like the Lab and the Black Prince.
We're really pleased that people like yourselves are putting on nights where audiences can experience the more niche music that's out there. Generally, live music seems to be turning into a covers band hegemony. We'd rather hear something different and original.

How did the band form?
From the ashes of two other bands who had often played together – Stedman (guitar) and Murdo (drums/keyboards) were in PigUnit. They started Skybeard in 2010 after that band broke up. Dave (bass) had been in Orwell Music and joined Skybeard in 2012. We had a second guitarist for a while but have been a three-piece since 2014.

Who are you influenced by?
Musically, anything from Queen to Mogwai, by way of Massive Attack, Kyuss, King Crimson, Tool, and an array of stoner/prog/post-rock/doom bands. Between us, we listen to loads of different stuff, from jazz to folk, indie rock and electronica.
Non-musically, anyone championing equality and compassion gets our support.

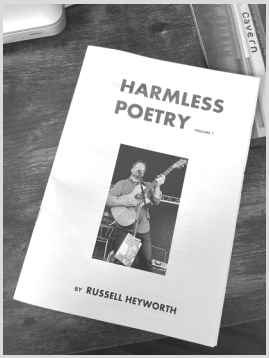
What's the best thing you've done to date?
Our next album, Who Told You You Were Naked (out soon on Bandcamp).
In our previous bands, we played the Mano Festival in Marburg, Germany, which was a crazy experience. We made some great friends there.

What's coming up next?
Our next album... and hopefully some more live shows.

REVIEWS

We take a look at new work from Shoetown artists & bands

POETRY



Harmless Poetry, volume 1, by **Russell Heyworth**

Russell Heyworth is a bit of a fixture of the Northampton scene, a musician, poet, radio broadcaster and live music promoter. He performs acoustic songs solo, and dark folk as part of the duo Maevis Darkhorse.

'Harmless Poetry, volume 1' might be his debut publication, but it might not, he's been doing this for a long time.

Crucially, it's a physical object. Recently, at the Lab, your writer had a discussion with James behind the bar about physical objects. The agreement was that people are getting tired of the impermanence of the digital world, and that AI created visuals and text are simply exhausting to look at. The enshittification of the internet has been so complete that it's rapidly becoming absolutely useless. How many times have you attempted to read an article on the Chronicle and Echo website only to have it jumping up and down the screen as adverts load before the entire page crashes? Most local news sites are now unuseable, and one must wonder why they even exist beyond serving adverts. So, people are tired, and people are craving real things to hold. You see it in the rise of vinyl, tapes, and even CDs, in TV lovers realising that their favourite episode of "I'm Alan Partridge" is missing from streaming services, or being shocked at the final scene of "Napoleon Dynamite" being absent from the version on Amazon Prime, and turning back to DVDs and Blu-ray.

Into this steps Russell, with his home printed and constructed booklet. Across 12 pages and 18 poems, Russell covers everything from childhood memories, musings on ageing, praise for The Lab, fury at the IDF, and even the topic of writing poetry. It's a cliché, but there really is something for everyone here, even those who think they probably don't like poetry. It's also only a quid, so there's practically no risk in picking up a copy if you see Russell out and about.

Looking forward to following volumes and the inevitable book that will be constructed from them.

https://www.instagram.com/russellheyworth

SINGLES

Runaway Child "Breaking Up Everything"

The debut single from Runaway Child is a chrome-coated blast of melody, a rush of fuzzed-up guitar and soaring vocals which is supremely confident in itself. The influence of second-wave pop-punk is strong, and this wouldn't have sounded out of place on "Dookie", "Let Go" or 'Enema of the State". An excellent opening salvo from a band that will no doubt be headlining a night at Twinfest in 2026.

Litesleeper "Killer"

Litesleeper's third single is a sample-driven groove that has an edge of Childish Gambino's "This Is America" about it. The central vocal sample is relentlessly deployed throughout the first half, and it makes this writer wonder if it would be even more effective with some unflinching social commentary over the top. The last third blows up into something that Phoenix or Air at their most strident would be proud of. Definitely their best release to date.

Cliff Hazzard "Y?"

Cliff Hazzard, the solo project of Neil from the Dodo Appreciation Society, is a more experimental prospect than his main band (if that's even possible). The tracks on "Y?" are short distorted bursts of lo-fi almost-hiphop, with some rapping, some shouting, some single word chanting ("Penis!" recalling the more scatalogical leanings of the Dodo's) Are these songs that could have made their way into the Dodo's recorded output, or are they the result of a constantly creative mind? Who knows, all we can say is we're glad they exist.

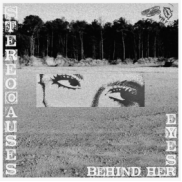
ALBUMS

Hideous Crawling Abomination "s/t"

Self-described 'goregrind' trio, Hideous Crawling Abomination's self titled new album is ten tracks of perfectly formed thick-as-fuck sheet metal guitar, practically gurgled vocals, and hammering drums. This isn't the kind of album where you pick out individual highlights (though the main riff in 'Crawler' is a favourite) and the songs do start to all sound like each other after a while, but that's kind of the point we imagine. This music isn't about variety, it's about pummelling the listener and we bet it sounds immense live. As an experiment we turned this up to painful levels in our headphones and it became immediately and vastly better. Deafen yourself for Hideous Crawling Abomination, you'll find you enjoy it.

Canyons "Garage Palace"

Canyons' first album since 2023's "Saturday Night In" is a grown-up slice of the kind of rock music that the late Q Magazine would have loved. There are hints of Lloyd Cole and the Commotions, Boo Hewerdine's The Bible, and Teenage Fanclub at their most Chilton-reverentially harmonising. 'Horse (an old song)' sounds like it's been lifted straight from the Daniel Lanois-produced "Red Dead Redemption 2" soundtrack, with a tremoloed guitar picking out a tune that could accompany Arthur Morgan as he rides to Saint Denis from Rhodes.
Canyons aren't afraid of letting songs run long, nor of getting political when they want to (albeit in a particularly polite manner), even if 'A Night in Pompey' sails rather close to 'What's Up' by 4 Non Blondes before managing to swerve into its own thing in a tale about an ill-fated trip to a football match (we assume - we know next to nothing about football).
Canyons are one of those bands that should, by all rights, be getting regular support slots when the Seriously Songwriters play the Black Prince, but who are probably considered 'too old' to open for that bloke from Gomez, or the (inexplicably uncancelled) chap from the Bluetones. It's a shame, because they're the kind of hidden gem that could pack out the Roadmender if only the people of Northampton knew about them.



Stereo Causes "Behind Her Eyes".
The terrible spectre of the N-word

Plaid shirts, ripped jeans, long lank locks, Pacific coast drawl, chunky riffs and the obligatory chorus-drenched track, you'd be forgiven for thinking it's 1991 Seattle all over again. Except it isn't. It's Northampton in 2025, and front man Jake Sawyer was nary a glint in anyone's eye when such things were *de rigeur*. Influences are worn openly and shamelessly here, veering dangerously close to open plagiarism of well known hooks (and even lyrics) from a certain Seattle band's black and blue releases. Despite the competent musicianship and pin-sharp production, the mercifully short 21 minutes of "Behind Her Eyes" will probably leave you thinking "Oh well, whatever, nevermind", but not in the way the band intended.

LIVE

photo Alex Botten

Piss Shivers, The Garibaldi, 12/09/2025

Piss Shivers are a band playing entirely by their own rules; their social media presence is almost nonexistent, with no apparent attempts at 'making it'. They exist in a world of their own creation and seem very happy there.
Temping as it is to immediately start harping on about the past (Spacemen 3, Spiritualised, Perfect Disaster, blah blah blah), Piss Shivers don't make any mention of or expect any favour due to their stellar back history. The trio of Kathy Schaer, Jonny Mattock, and Steve Gordon instead epitomise the 'let the music do the talking' ethos, eschewing all show and artifice.
Tonight, they were wedged between the noise rock of fellow locals ÜLV and the political Fall-isms of Manchester's The Dirt. While the opening act pummelled with volume, and the headliners hammered their message via booming drum machine and washes of guitar, Piss Shivers took a more considered approach. Backed by a ticking, almost toylike, drum machine, the trio summoned a sparse beauty from deceptively simple songs.
Piss Shivers bring to mind the skeletal 'even less is more' Young Marble Giants, albeit with sudden bursts of Kevin Shields-esque noise from Steve, anchored by the perfectly understated bass playing of Kathy. Nothing was overstated; every note placed into a lattice of interlocking parts, where guitars remained mostly clean. In an era (and town) where brutally destroyed tones are the norm, there is a rebellion in allowing the clean chime of a Telecaster and Stratocaster to ring out. The sudden shards of unexpected noise hit all the more effectively as a result of the band's simplicity.
The songs are, as you would expect, glorious. "Obliterate the Dark", a deceptively breezy ode to passing friends, was a highlight, as was "Big Blue Bubble" but, really, every moment was a highlight; they're one of those kinds of bands. They end as they played, with no announcement or climax, they just *finish*, perfection.
The audience at the Gari loved them, as will you.

https://pissshivers1.bandcamp.com/

COUNTERPOINTS: Jordan Jones and Russell Heyworth express their different experiences of this year's Northampton Music Festival

Northampton Music Festival 2025 has been and gone. I have no issue at all with Northampton Town BID. It is my belief that it has had a wonderful impact upon the town. I also have no issue with an out of town band headlining the main stage, as it will not only encourage local music fans but others to enjoy a free live music event. It can be argued that there are factors that have had a negative impact and left a sour taste.

But let's start with positives; the acoustic stage at V&B is a wonderful asset to the festival, providing a venue for the ever growing number of acoustic acts that play each year. The King Billy, hosting the rock stage, was also a welcome addition to the festival. It is no great secret that the Billy has had a turbulent few years, so perhaps this is a positive reflection on the new management? As for the bands there, with one exception, I have never seen any of them on bills at local gigs.

It was was also refreshing to see the Market Square put to good use as the main stage location. Better still to see vital locations like Performing Room returning. Sadly, in my opinion, this is as far as the positives go. I, and other local musicians, are disillusioned with BBC Introducing curating the main stage. I have developed a strong belief that BBC introducing is now out of touch with the loclal music scene. Did we need another Billy Lockett performance? I believe BBC Introducing should have their own stage away from the main stage. It can also be argued it was odd to see one act have two slots, and some of the same names popping up year after year. Another issue is the new Hushed Stage being located at George's Tea Room. Why was a cafe with no connection to the local music scene assigned a stage? While it is understandable that the organisers wanted to keep everything within the vicinity of the town centre/ cultural quarter, there are numerous other venues that consistently provide a platform for live music. Pub venues like The Fish, The Mailcoach, The Wig and Pen and Rosie O'Learys were notable by their absence.

A brief discussion with another musician raised a relevant point: Where are all the musicians that play in the town 365 days of the year? Nowhere. Non-muscians and local music fans have alsi observed the same point. With the risk of sounding like the music scene equivalent of a Nationalist fart, I strongly feel that a Northampton Music Festival SHOULD be for, and proud to promote, Northampton musicians. It is what feels like a very limited and unrepresentative image of the towns rich music scene. Or perhaps this is what the organisers believe the music scene should look like? Is it a case of bias and the organisers going with safe choices? I understand it is a difficult process but for me it was a disappointing line-up, making me consider "who really are the gate keepers?" and whether this is a festival organised by people who aren't interested in music for an audience of people who also aren't interested.

Jordan Jones

Hushed offered to curate a stage at NMF25. We found a location, George's Tea Rooms, a café with a garden in the middle of the town centre. We invited local singer-songwriters to come along, sat back and waited to see what would happen.

The result?... a heavenly afternoon of tea, cakes, mellow performances. We created an oasis of calm within the bustle of the town-wide event. A space to chill, to listen, to enjoy a charming garden with sandstone walls and a charming fishpond complete with fountain, and eat cake.

A steady flow of inquisitive locals traipsed through on the way to larger stages. Curious maybe of the Hushed banner out on Georges Row, were they even allowed to talk?

Of course, and clap and enjoy. Mojo Mules headlined, Stephen Tanner played a faultless set, experienced hands Jono and Kev Lamey added local narrative and wit. Graciee announced her superb voice and writing skills to the town. Ohm-lit delighted with the perfect festival set and Becci and Markus gave us a pinch of locally sourced folk

It was great experience to run a stage and be part of NMF25. Plus, hopefully we promoted the Hushed brand. Local and proud, searching for new talent and with the ability to pop up when least expected.

The only drawback was we didn't get a chance to see other performers and stages. There will always be niggles about line up choices, but the enormous number of performers make this complaint meaningless, there is so much choice on the smaller stages to keep everyone happy. Is it 18 years now of NMF? I always look forward to it. The buzz of the performances on our town's streets, the bumping into old school mates, ex-colleagues, friends you had lost/forgotten. Surely, we can't let another one pass without an A Void stage. Come on guys get a venue sorted for next year, there's always room for one more stage.

Russell Heyworth

https://www.facebook.com/georgestearoom

Meet **Mushroom Tea**

A Void: What is your take on the Northampton scene?
Mushroom Tea: As we are a new band, we have not fully experienced the Northampton scene in our current line-up. From past experiences of playing, rehearsing and going to gigs in Northampton though, the scene is lively and there are a lot of great artists! The DIY ethos is quite prevalent in a lot of the bands. There are some great bands playing around and even though there isn't always much to cheer about in Northampton the Arts and Music scene is definitely one of them! It can be difficult for some bands to get regular gigs, especially if they may be unconventional or do not have members who aren't as well known.

A Void: How did the band form?
MT: We found each other online; Grant was looking to form a new band as his last one parted ways. He found a drummer and they practiced together for a few weeks learning some original songs Grant he from his previous band and some new ideas and then they found the singer Abi, shortly followed by bassist Berk! From there we have continued to practice, create new songs and play a couple of gigs.

A Void: Who are your influences?
MT: Abi – RØRY, Faouzia, Muse, The Pretty Reckless, South Arcade.
Berk – Metallica, Oingo Boingo.
Grant – Jack White/The White Stripes, The Mars Volta, At The Drive-In.

A Void: What's the best thing you've done so far?
MT: Creating a band that from the start we believe has created good, unique and original songs. We like to think that our songs show our varied influences and ideas and show each of our personalities within them. We aim to create unique songs that we enjoy playing and that hopefully others like too!

A Void: What is coming up next?
MT: We are currently writing new songs to expand our set list, we are completing DIY demos of our existing songs and continuing to search for more gigs! We hope to be recording a single at some point in the not so distance future and hope to have some more gigs in the Northamptonshire area and beyond.

Meet **Sian Essam**

A Void: Tell us about yourself
Sian: I'm Sian Essam - a 23y/o soulful singer/songwriter from Northampton. I am a fun-loving, free-spirit who loves getting to know new people and trying to make the most out of this crazy world. Music has always been a big part of my life. My parents are musicians and it runs through me. I love putting my headphones on and letting music take me away. And best believe I'm singing everywhere I go!

A Void: What's been your experience of the local scene?
Sian: Northampton has a great music scene! So many talented people all in one place and lots of opportunities to connect with other artists. I feel blessed to live in such a booming town. There's music nights all over town all week, something for everyone. I started off at the Mail Coach open mic 4 years ago. I went back almost every week because the community in there was super encouraging. You'll still find me at the MC open mic some Thursdays. Jonty's Jam at The Lab on Tuesday is particularly fun as it's a free for all and you can jump in whenever and go where the music takes you, it takes me out my comfort zone musically.

A Void: What's been your proudest moment to date?
Sian: My first Saturday gig. The Mail Coach reached out and asked me if I could do their reopening show. I was so honoured! I was nervous, but gave it my all. I felt so proud and so supported! I'd love to tell my younger self what I've achieved and all my plans for the future. She wouldn't believe it! It's something I always dreamed of, but fear of not being perfect held me back - especially with music. 2025 has been the year I let that anxiety go and put trust in myself.

A Void: What's coming up?
Sian: I recently wrote a song and I'm in love with it! When I was working in a warehouse, I felt so uninspired, but this song came to me randomly one shift and has turned into something beautiful. I will be releasing an EP soon of original songs so watch this space people!

photo by Aneta Stelmaszewska https://www.instagram.com/anestephotography

A Free Pint for Performers

Tales from The Open Mic Night Scene

by Kieran Stowell

The humble Open Mic night.
To some, it is a rite of passage, a means to finally prove both to themselves and the world that they have what it takes to be a live performer, for others, it is merely a stretch of the muscles, an opportunity to practice their material in a risk-free environment, and for more carefree individuals, it is simply an excuse to get drunk and have a sing-along with strangers.
Regardless of the type of performer you are, Open Mic nights can offer an opportunity to be involved and recognised within a community of like-minded individuals, all without the need to hack off a piece of your soul or to feed yourself to the social media content machine.
I played my first Open Mic in 2012, and as a neurodiverse, socially awkward teenager with low self-esteem, I strangely did not feel nervous, instead I had convinced myself that this was my big break, and I would be carried solely by the power of the angsty songs I had written in my bedroom.
Unsurprisingly, my set was met with a luke-warm reception and was immediately overshadowed by the next performer's pitch perfect, rendition of Old Crow Medicine Show's "Wagon Wheel."
Despite the sobering experience, I did not feel defeated, in fact, the act of performing to an audience was an absolute thrill, and has remained so throughout the years, even during times where I have embarrassed myself by singing out of tune, forgetting lyrics, and failing to have a witty response to hecklers.
It is not just the personal high from performing that has kept me coming back to the Open Mic circuits, it is the sense of community.
It truly cannot be understated, the warm sensation you feel when the person running the Open Mic, simply remembers your name, or the sense of encouragement that comes from the support of enthusiastic crowd members, and there is certainly something to be said about the high you feel when you receive compliments from another performer who just prior to you, had put on a performance so good, that it made you consider packing up and going home.

I have always played as a solo musician, I often arrive alone, drink alone and leave quietly after playing and watching a few other acts. Despite the joy I feel engaging in a community of open minded, artistically driven people, I usually prefer that they seek me out for conversation as I am more comfortable introducing myself on stage than in person.
With that in mind, there have been Open Mic Nights that I have attended that I feel are unwelcoming to lone songwriters such as I. Some pubs I have been to, actively dismiss those who play original songs, and I have been to others that do the opposite, with each one enforcing strict rules on what can and cannot be performed. In one extreme example, there was an Open Mic where the host had the power to cut you off mid-set if what your playing did not meet their taste. Unfortunately, I was one of those poor souls, and it is safe to say I packed up my guitar and did not return to that establishment.
But something that is a more common trend, are Open Mic nights that feel ruled by its regulars. These are the venues, where every evening without fail, I would arrive on time, only to find the best time slots have been taken by the same people, all who are close friends of the evening's host, thus leaving me with a performance slot so late, that I ended up hanging around, drinking just to pass the time, and then performing to a crowd of stragglers, whilst trying to maintain my balance.
For these venues, it is not enough, just to show up with your weapon of choice and perform, as to stand a chance of performing at a reasonable time and to an actual audience, you need to find a way to get in the good books of the host. Which only goes to show that just like the mainstream music industry, success in certain Open Mic circuits is measured by who you know, rather than what you can do.
I strongly believe that any Open Mic host worth their salt, should be ensuring that every performer where possible, gets a fair chance to display their talents, and is provided with the necessary encouragement to perform, regardless of their musical tastes.
Additionally, I also think it should also be up to the host to advocate for pubs to bring back the free pint for performers policy, as from what I have noticed, this practice seems to have died out in recent years... just saying.
However, in my 4 years of living in Northampton, I have played in various venues, with my favourites being The Mailcoach and more recently, The Garibaldi Hotel, which are both run by excellent hosts, who encourage an environment that is inclusive and supportive of the performers and their art, and have really helped me keep my passion for performing alive.
If you are reading this and are looking to get started, or you're new in town and just looking for a place to play, then I can say without exaggeration, that Northampton's Open Mic scene is one of the best I have experienced, and I look forward to seeing what you've got!

300ft Pete Murphy

Andrew Slack explains why Shoetown should make more of its goth hero

When walking the streets of Northampton it is difficult to go far without running into an old shoe factory, now converted into flats. Reminders of the town's historical past as a centre of shoe manufacturing are everywhere. It's in the buildings, the nickname of the football team and a huge part of the cultural identity of the town.

The same cannot be said of Northampton's most famous band. There is a map of the country forever doing the rounds on social media, with the names of the English counties replaced by the best selling bands from that region. It's a fascinating and terrifying thing to behold, with some real shockers on there, and it really brings home the size of Yorkshire when you see Shed Seven emblazoned across its borders. I've never visited Devon but if I did I can imagine myself saying, "Be careful, we're in Muse country now. They have strange customs here". Likewise for the poor sods who live in East Sussex. My advice: Throw yourselves into the English Channel glady to escape the mediocrity of Keane.

Luckily in Northamptonshire we have Bauhaus, standing proudly in the Midlands, surrounded on all sides by neighbouring representative bands and artists of dubious quality. The asinine Kasabian to the north, the hugely overrated Radiohead to the southwest, the risible Marillion to the southeast... Thankfully Spiritualised, Olivia Newton-John and Jethro Tull stop us from being completely adrift in a sea of shit. I have never bothered to check the validity of this map and don't intend to. What if Bauhaus' position was usurped by Steps? Faye Tozer was born here. Small chance it could be The Departure. That band's blink-and-you'll- miss-it career suggests they made fuck all in the way of money from record sales. So we have Bauhaus and for this we should be glad.

As a non-native (Prefab Sprout/County Durham), and someone who has only lived here for about 25 years, Bauhaus' position on the map is a source of pride. Whenever I encounter someone complaining about Northampton (usually someone born here) I always say: "But this is the home of Bauhaus! And Alan Moore!" If this is met with a blank stare I usually mention 'Keeping up Appearances' and get told to piss off.

But joking aside the band are criminally underrepresented in the town. It is impossible to imagine visiting Liverpool and finding no trace of the Beatles, or Manchester and not encountering the legacy of the Smiths or Joy Division. Even Hull has Mick Ronson's shed as a tourist destination. But in Northampton, nothing.They featured in the recent Punk exhibit at the museum but for a band as influential as Bauhaus it's a sad state of affairs when you can't even manage a mural. This would be a start but it is easy to imagine something much grander. How about a 300ft statue of Pete Murphy, naked if you like, situated on the site of the old Greyfriers bus station? We can call it Murphy the Redeemer. Or have it out in the sticks, astride the A508, and call it the Colossus of Roade. Perhaps we could chisel the band's faces onto the side of the Express Lift Tower? These things only require a bit of imagination. If WNC can spend £12m revamping a market place only for it to look the same they can surely spend some money commemorating Northampton's greatest band.

I don't know how often Pete Murphy sang of his hometown but a line in the hauntingly beautiful 'All We Ever Wanted Was Everything' stands out. Murphy sings: "Flash of youth, shoots out of darkness...Factory town", conjuring up an image of Bauhaus as luminous beings, escaping the confines of a post-industrial town and into the world at large. Perhaps they never wanted to be remembered as a provincial band, but for those of us living here they should be recognised and celebrated as a part of the town's rich, cultural history.

The Nix Nene Report

Armed with a pen & a free subscription to Grammarly, our intrepid writer covers the latest happenings

photo by Alex Botten

The Dodo Appreciation Society/Weesy/ÜLV/Joy Disposal Unit, The Black Prince, 17/07/2025

A Void Collective, a local DIY promotion based in Northampton, have been putting on free monthly gigs at the Lab in Northampton, and so far the shows have been pretty well attended. Tonight's event is a bit of a departure, a ticketed gig in a much bigger venue, the Black Prince, featuring some of the Collective's founding members.

Raising the stakes further, the bands are also competing with a pub quiz in the other room, and judging by the size of the crowd, it looks like they've lost. There is an oft-quoted story about the Sex Pistols famous gig at the Lesser Free Trade Hall in Manchester. It goes that of the 40 or so people in attendance, the majority went on to form a band; Joy Division, the Buzzcocks, the Smiths and the Fall can be traced back to that night in 1976. Mick Hucknall was also there apparently, giving us another reason to dislike John Lydon. Let's hope an audience of aspiring Hucknalls doesn't turn up tonight, ushering in a terrifying new era of Simply Red inspired indie rock. Although looking at the audience, there's no chance of that; everyone in the crowd already IS in a band, awaiting their turn to take the stage and play to each other. Well, at least they got in for free.

Up first is Joy Disposal Unit followed by ÜLV. The running order has been decided randomly on the night and these two drew the short straws. I already covered both bands a couple of months ago. You know the drill: post-punk, noise rock, Fender guitars, drum machines, pedals, thin, middle-aged, bitter, angry, hair, beards, t-shirts, Underground, Over ground, Wombling Free blah blah etc etc...

Y'know what...sod this, I'll be back for the Dodo Appreciation Society, possibly Weesy time permitting, the quiz beckons...

This could be a bold new frontier in music journalism: the art of reviewing bands by not reviewing bands. I've dragged my arse all over this town in pursuit of live music so I think it's time I earned myself a little respite. Pint of Guinness, Team Name: Solitary Workshy Hack, pen poised...This is more like it, and possibly where I've been going wrong my whole life, reviewing live music instead of pub quizzes. Quizzes don't talk back, don't damage your hearing and never get angry over a bad review. There's the chance you might win money and you will definitely learn something, whereas music actually destroys brain cells. I know this from experience after coming away from a Limp Bizkit concert in 1999 with 'Break Stuff' looping in my brain and about 30 I.Q points worse off. I call this phenomenon 'The Durst Effect' and it happens with other bands; Muse, Maroon 5 and Stereophonics to name a few. I'll possibly write a thesis on it one day but it's getting harder; I'm perilously close to a double digit I.Q and one more dumb band experience could render me illiterate. Ok, round 1, question 1...

Long story short I lost and came last. How am I supposed to know anything about hedging plants and the NFL? I'm a music journalist! 4/10. Let this be a lesson to me.

Back in the main room it looks as though I've missed Weesy and the Dodo Appreciation Society are about to start. And what's this?! A crowd has turned up! Not massive but a turnout. What else have i missed?

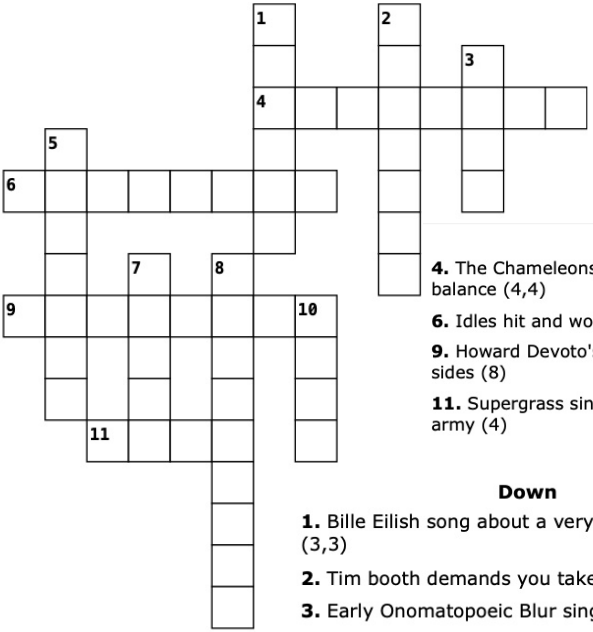
The Dodos are weird, and will hopefully always be weird, but to my ears have mainstream appeal. Their staccato, punchy songs, mostly from new album 'Animal Frequencies' are catchy and universally funny, covering such highly relatable subjects as wasps in the bedroom and the sound elephants make. Who among us hasn't pondered the sex life of a slug? All of this is delivered with the confidence of a comic who finds his own material amusing and doesn't care what the world thinks. They also show us that two-piece bands don't have to be boring blues-inspired-riff-rock like Royal Blood, the Black Keyes and Northampton's terminally dull Fo..(*now now, be nice. Ed*). The duo form an impressive sight, with singer/guitarist Neil stage right, bespectacled and bearded in a bowler hat, guitar too high but affording us the best possible view of drummer Sam, sporting red and white spotted toadstool headgear, and a coat that looks like it's made out of AstroTurf. His theatrically flailing but precise drumming truely is a thing to behold. They don't hang around either, with the entire set coming in at around half an hour. The song about Karen's husband is worth the price of admission alone. All Hail The Dodo, indeed! Let's hope they never visit Mauritius.

And that's it. The night is over, and it looks like it's been a success for A Void Collective. As for me, while I may have wasted a pound on the quiz and narrowly avoided a potentially foolish change of career, I returned at the eleventh hour to once again champion underground music. I can at least feel good about that.

Walking out of the pub I eye up the tawdry, blinking lights of a fruit machine and pause, reaching into my pocket for change like Frodo fumbling nervously for the Ring. I smile grimly, reminding myself of the gambler's fallacy, and walk out into the night.

Bollocks at the Back

The Flatman Crossword



Across

4. The Chameleons recommend you retain your balance (4,4)

6. Idles hit and wonder of the ancient world (8)

9. Howard Devoto's band were shot by both sides (8)

11. Supergrass single gets mixed up in the army (4)

Down

1. Bille Eilish song about a very naughty man (3,3)

2. Tim booth demands you take a seat (3,4)

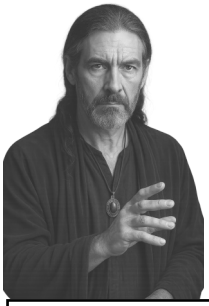
3. Early Onomatopoeic Blur single (4)

5. The result of a Zappa LP where he left the heating on in the testing laboratory (3,4)

7. Blondie said of her 'You've got to see her, go insane, out of your mind' (5)

8. 'Stones LP required some filthy employment (5,4)

10. Irish singer's hits include Orinoco Flow and Only Time (4)



A Void Disaster with our Monthly Horoscopes by Terry Kinesis

Aries (March 21- Apr 20) Old Slow Hands, elder god of bigotry and shit blues licks, is threatening to drown us in a river of blood. Be good to your neighbour and practice tolerance

Taurus (Apr 21- May 21) You suffer...but why? Only the gods of napalm and death have the answer. Be brief and try not to think too much.

Gemini (May 22 – June 21) This town ain't big enough for the both of us. Get out. Now. There's only room for one Astrologer in Northampton.

Cancer (June 22 – July 22) Yes we know that Dancing in the Moonlight has a nice chord progression but please stop playing it. Your thoughtless strumming has awakened something nameless and evil.

Leo (July 23 – Aug 22) Are we human? Or are we dancer? In this uncertain world there are few universal truths. Luckily "The Killers are shit" is one such truth. Engrave this adage on your heart and you will survive the month.

Virgo (Aug 23 – Sept 22) Lately you've been thinking your music collection is facile and unchallenging. This might be true. You've also been thinking about buying 'Metal Machine Music' by Lou Reed. This is a mistake. It's unlistenable.

Libra (Sept 23 – Oct 22) Your inane shuffling at the indie disco has caught the attention of BEZelbub, lesser deity of freaky dancing. Offer a sincere prayer to Michael Flatley, Lord of the Dance so your soul might be saved..

Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21) The WIND OF CHANGE is howling, and a new romance threatens to ROCK YOU LIKE A HURRICANE, but don't forget about STILL LOVING YOU.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 – Dec 21) The eye's of Bowie have fixed you with their heterochromatic gaze. Big Ch-ch-Changes are coming. Don't resist.

Capricorn (Dec 22 – Jan 20) On the 8th Day the machine just got upset. Hazel O'Connor had a point. AI slop, the planet burning, billionaire technocrats, a dystopian future... things seem bleak but trust your eyes and your ears, and above all else, think.

Aquarius (Jan 21 – Feb 19) It is the dawning of the age of Aquarius and the Eldritch truth is revealed: The Mission are, and always were, bollocks

Pisces (Feb 20 – March 20) "Squid Lord revenge...vast...just...his intelligence spreads..." Not my words, the words of M.E.S. It is always tempting to invoke the wrath of Cthulhu on your enemies but forgiveness is an option

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Want to play one of our shows or write for us? Drop us a line at https://linktr.ee/avoidcollective

Next Issue: Marabar Caves, Piss Shivers, Moon Haze, Helen Verrill, why tribute bands are shit and cover bands even worse, plus the usual reviews, interviews, and opinion.